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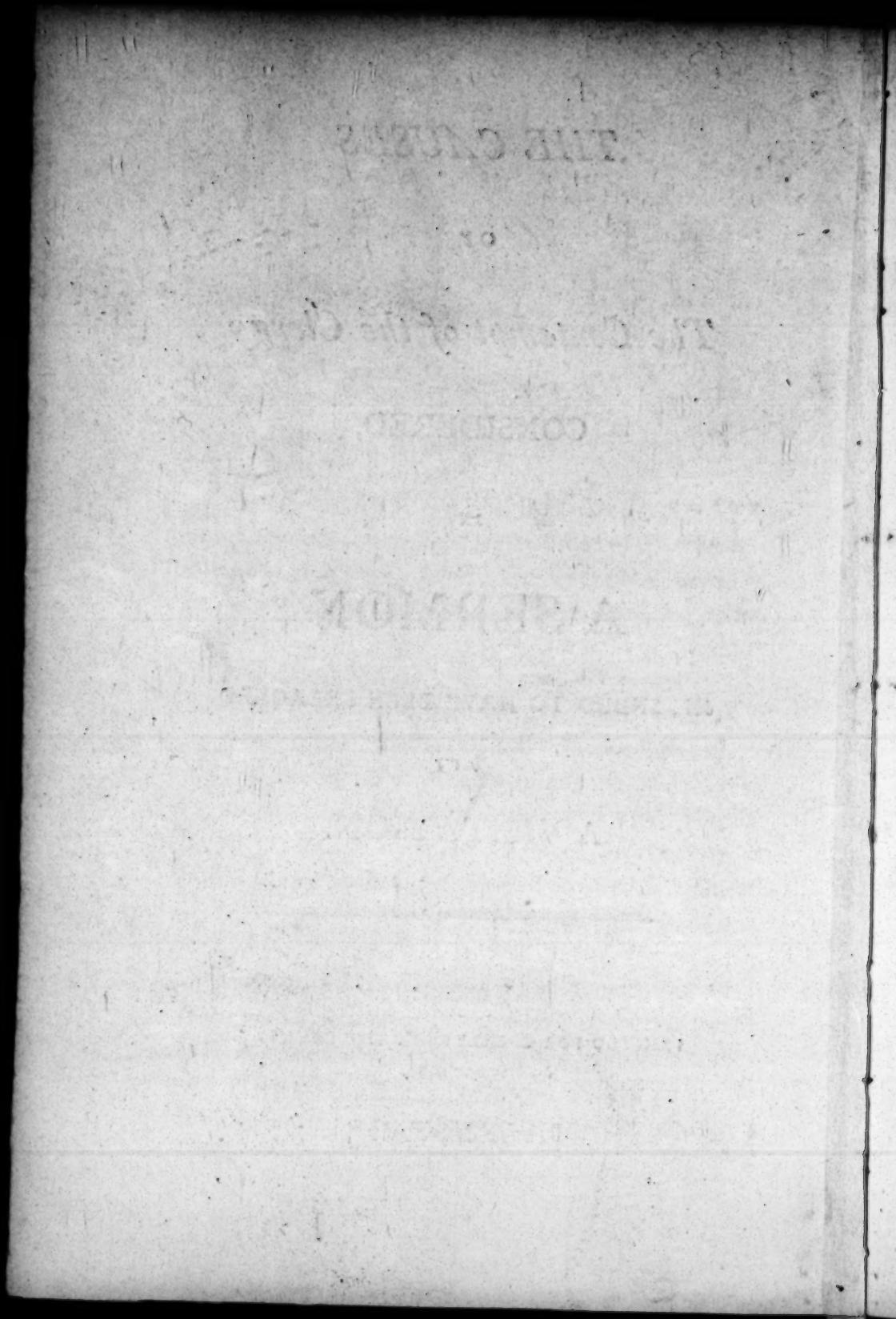
THE CAUSES
OF
The Contempt of the Clergy
CONSIDERED,
IN
A SERMON
INTENDED TO HAVE BEEN PREACHED
AT
A VISITATION.

London:

PRINTED FOR C. DILLY, IN THE POULTRY.

M DCC XCVI.

[Price Six-Pence.]



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S E R M O N.

Titus, chap. ii. ver. 15.

LET NO MAN DESPISE THEE.

THE Apostle Paul having left Titus in Crete, to "set in order things that were wanting, and to ordain Elders in every city," gives him, amongst other excellent directions, this in the text; "let no man despise thee."

It hath been supposed that these words were addressed to the whole Church at Crete, and did not contain merely an admonition to Titus so to conduct himself, both with respect to his life and doctrine, as to give no just cause for being despised; but I shall consider them as conveying such a direction to Titus, and to all Christian Ministers.

When we consider how necessary it is that the ministerial character should be respected, and how naturally contempt of a Minister occasions a contempt of his office, we shall be convinced that it is the very "foolishness of folly" to suppose that a profession will

extort respect, when he who is engaged in it so de-mands himself as to become justly contemptible. No man can act out of character without being despised : and we shall be despised, as we ought to be, if we ne-glect the sacred duties of our office, and consider the titles by which it is dignified in Scripture, not as lively admonitions to our duty, and stimulating incentives to the diligent discharge of it, but as empty titles of un-earned honour.

If, even in private life, he, who despises fame, may be supposed to despise virtue, what will be thought of him who stands in the venerable character of a publick instructor in moral and religious duties, which he ap-pears notoriously to disregard.

The reverence, the influence, the usefulness of his station is irrevocably lost ; the “garment of holiness” will preserve no respect to him who preserves none for his own reputation ; and, though he plead the cause of Heaven with the eloquence of an angel, he will not be attended to. Surely then it is the duty of all who are engaged in the ministerial office, who wish to pro-mote the glory of God, and the salvation of mankind, to guard, with the utmost vigilance, against a conduct that may disgrace their character ; against every, the remotest, approach to any thing that may cause others to speak evil of their profession ; remembering that their example must have great weight in forming the manners

manners and principles of their hearers ; that Paul exhorts Timothy to " take heed to himself," as well as to his doctrine ; and that a regard to the former advice is not less necessary than to the latter, if they would have " no man despise them."

It may not, perhaps, be improper, on this occasion, to enquire what are supposed to be the chief causes of the contempt of the Clergy.

The commonly alledged causes of this contempt are *Immorality, Ignorance, and Bigotry* : but is it unreasonable to suppose that these charges originate, generally, in partial and prejudiced information, rather than in truth ?

With respect to *Immorality*, charity will incline us to hope that such traitors to their sacred trust ; such enemies to God, to their country, and their own souls, are few indeed. Nothing can so greatly and so universally injure the cause of virtue and religion as frequent and glaring failures in morals amongst those whose office obliges them strongly to enforce on their hearers a most pure and perfect system of morality and piety, and whose duty requires that they should best understand its value and indispensable obligations, and discover their conviction of the force of those obligations by an exemplary life. Indeed, were there no superior motives, the slightest regard to honour, or common

prudence, should impel every Minister most scrupulously to avoid a conduct which will render him deservedly vile in the eyes of the world.

It is, certainly, very natural for the serious hearers of a publick instructor in religion to compare his conduct with his exhortations ; to consider his life as the criterion of his doctrines ; and to doubt his sincerity in the recommendation of duties to which he pays no regard himself : whilst the profligate and unprincipled will gladly plead their Minister's prostitution of character as an excuse for their own vices ; will say (and with truth) that the Minister who is eminently immoral ; who lives not merely in the neglect, but in the audacious defiance of those laws of virtue and religion which he is so solemnly bound to inculcate by precept and by example, is utterly unworthy the station which he fills, and the maintenance he receives ; and exclaim, with insulting triumph, these are they who will neither enter into the kingdom of Heaven themselves nor suffer those that are entering to go in.

What care, then, what fear, what holy zeal should every Minister unremittingly exert to preserve his character pure and unsullied ! How should he shrink, like the sensitive plant, not only from evil, but from all appearance of evil ! Should his pestilent example not produce the extensive mischief justly to be apprehended from it, still he must be greatly criminal, by derogating

ing from that decency, dignity, and sanctity of character which alone can enable him to be useful ; alone can shield him from merited detestation, and prevent himself and his profession (however unjustly reprobated for the guilt of a few) from becoming the sport of the thoughtless and the triumph of the wicked.

Deeply conscious of my own deficiencies, I enter on the next alledged cause of contempt with peculiar diffidence ; and shall, therefore, only observe, that every Minister should frequently reflect that it is his duty * to make that progress in learning which he promised at his ordination ; that he, who neglects the improvement of his own mind, must be unable to instruct others ; and that, although it be unjust, cruel, illiberal, and unmanly to despise all of mean intellects, at least to discover that we despise them, a Minister's hearers will pay little regard to his exhortations, if they hold his abilities in contempt. We may recollect that being

* Of him, says Dr. Johnson, who is appointed to teach, the first business is to learn ; an unremitting attendance to reading must qualify him to be heard with profit. It is required of him to be always able to prove what he asserts ; to give an account of his hope, and to display his opinion with such evidence as every species of argument admits. For such service he can only be fitted by laborious study ; and study, therefore, is the business of his life ; a business which he cannot neglect without breaking a virtual contract with the community.

blind was considered, by a virtuous Roman, as a sufficient reason for declining the Consulate; and cannot but feel that it would be the highest dishonour to be deficient in those branches of literature which our office requires, and which alone can render us “well instructed unto the kingdom of God.”

That *Bigotry*, which destroys every amiable sensibility of our Nature, and steals the heart against the impressions of humanity, should exist in an enlightened age is much to be lamented: that men of liberal education should be deaf to the loud dictate of candour, which requires that they should allow to all others that unbounded liberty of thought which they claim for themselves, should forget the inviolability of mental independence; and that the human mind naturally repels every insolent attempt to subject it to the yoke of opinion, the meanest of all bondage, is truly astonishing: but that Christian Ministers, who are so repeatedly, and so earnestly, admonished to “be kindly affectioned one to another; to walk worthy of their vocation, with lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering, forbearing one another in love;” who so well know that a blind attachment to tenets, sects, and parties, has been the fruitful source of those shocking persecutions which have stained and disgraced almost every page of ecclesiastical history; that they should forget the benevolent genius and temper of Christianity is almost incredible.

If

If any, the faintest, trace of this unchristian spirit yet, unhappily, remain amongst us, let us instantly, heartily, and unanimously exert every nerve to annihilate it ; and, if there must be controversies, let us, invariably, treat all who differ from us with the spirit of meekness, the liberality of scholars, and the language of gentlemen ; never losing the meek and candid Christian in the disputer of this world ; never forgetting that genuine virtue and piety are equally to be found amongst men of every persuasion ; and that all ought to be considered as our brethren who conscientiously practise what they believe to be truth. “ Hath “ not God made of one blood all the nations of men “ that dwell on the earth ? Have we not all one Fa-“ ther ? ”

Let us now consider a less avowed indeed, but probably a more general cause of contempt, experienced by the inferior Clergy : I recal that word ; from the conviction that equal respect is due to all who are employed in the ministerial office ; and that, if there be a post of honour, they possess it ; who “ labour in the “ word and doctrine ; and best approve themselves the “ Ministers of God in patience, in afflictions, in ne-“ cessities, in distresses.”

Most earnestly is it to be wished that all who thus faithfully discharge the duties of their office, and do true honour to their Ministry, could, at least, escape contempt :

contempt : but it is a very old observation that, "as, " when a rich man speaketh, every one holdeth his " peace, and lo ! what he saith is extolled to the " clouds ; so, when a poor man speaketh, they are " ready to say, What fellow is this ?" And experience convinceth us that the world still seems to connect the ideas of merit and wealth. Even the meanest of the people are too ready to disregard the instructions of a man whose worldly circumstances they know to be no better than their own. The poor Minister's wisdom is despised, and his words are not regarded. This, it must be acknowledged, is a sore evil ; and, even if the patience of a Minister thus unworthily treated rise superior to the scoff of fools ; if he comforts himself with the reflection that " it is a very small thing that " he should be judged of man's judgment ;" and that, as he must " approve himself to God through honour " and dishonour," he will not pay such a compliment to the ignorant and the worthless, as to be deeply affected by their censures, still there are circumstances in his situation which cause the heart of humanity to bleed at every pore.

May I hope, my reverend brethren, that you will pardon me if, in the short remainder of this discourse I presume to call your attention to the distresses of the assistant clergy, whose situation cannot be contemplated without sympathy.

Let

Let us suppose one of these humble, but not least worthy, Ministers weekly retiring from the insults of a pitiless world to his study*; there to indulge in that delightful and instructive employment to which he has been trained by an education purchased, perhaps, at the expence of his whole fortune; there to soothe his wounded spirit, recover the ruffled serenity of his temper, and seek consolation in the word of God.

Even into this fancied asylum domestic distresses will imperiously intrude. The necessity of acquiring his daily bread with means so inadequate; the reflection that, though hacknied in the drudgery of curacies, he can barely procure an uncomfortable subsistence; and that he works for less than the stipend of a common mechanic, I had almost said of a daily labourer†;

* A proposal was made, some time since, in a country paper, that (as the library of a country curate, who has nothing but his stipend to support him, must be extremely circumscribed) every beneficed clergyman should subscribe one guinea, annually, out of every hundred which he receives, for the purpose of purchasing books for the use of curates *resident in villages*. It is not improbable that more than one instance may be found of curates whose library (if such it may be called) little exceeds that of an amiable, but unfortunate poet, which consisted of one book only; but that, as himself observed, *the best*.

† On December the 17th, 1795, the late Mr. Stock's donation of ten pounds was given to three curates, having each of them

and this at a time when the price of every necessary of life is so astonishingly advanced, that even œconomy herself cannot enable him to make an appearance in some degree adequate to his station; when to this is added the saddening consideration that such is his *lot for life*; that, whilst abilities and industry in other departments will procure a support equal to the rank men maintain in society; and that, if sickness, or accident, load them, occasionally, with additional expences, they can, by double diligence, reinstate themselves in their former condition; the needy, assistant Minister may exert his utmost abilities in the exercise of his parochial duties; may be a bright example of every thing that tends to bless and to adorn life; may sow the seeds of goodness through the land, and be equally characterized by piety and poverty, and, with respect to this world, it shall profit him nothing: no exertion, no parsimony, can remedy these evils: this depressed, though venerable man, must be contented with his wretched pittance; must languish out a life of labour; go on sorrowing all his days, and struggle unceasingly with the distresses inevitably attending his forlorn situation, without any hope of advancement from the

them only 30 pounds a year, and six children: to one having only 20 pounds a year, and four children; to one having only 20 pounds a year, and eight children; to one having only 18 pounds a year, and six children; and to one having only *fifteen* pounds a year, and four children!!!

most

most meritorious conduct, even when he descends into the vale of years; his burthen, increasing as his strength and hopes decay, until, from such an accumulation of miseries, he drops, broken hearted, into the hospitable grave; the agonies of his last convulsive pangs increasing to tenfold acuteness by reflections on the complicated distress of those whom he leaves.

Let us turn from the soul-harrowing contemplation, to enquire, whether these scenes of misery, depression and contempt, may not be alleviated*, if not prevented.

Much stress, too much, perhaps, has sometimes been laid on precedents: but there is one precedent which holds forth to the assitant Clergy a cheerful expectation that their distresses are not remediless, and that they should not “ sorrow as men without hope.”

In the year 1661, a bill was sent from the House of Commons to that of the Lords, with this title, “ *An*

* It is in the power of more highly stationed members of the church to relieve, partially at least, the distresses of their poorer brethren. Why should beneficed men (as is, I believe, the case in some dioceses) alone be surrogates? Why should not curates of exemplary character, and with large families be appointed to that office? The emolument on a licence, though scarce an object to a beneficed man, would cause the heart of many a curate to leap for joy.

Act for a competent allowance to be made to such Curates as shall officiate in those livings where the proper incumbent does not reside." It was sent to the *House of Lords*; and there, where we might reasonably have expected that it would have found a kind reception, and been cherished with the most fostering care, there did it expire!

But let not this appal us; rather let the recollection that in the year 1661*, one branch of the legislature pronounced our situation such as demanded their compassionate notice, inspirit us to unite in an address to Parliament. All who respect humble, neglected worth, will sympathise with us, and say, God speed you. Every benevolent heart is our's. Let us not, for a moment, suppose that a contemptuous rejection will add insult to distress, occasioned by no fault or misconduct of our own; but assure ourselves that, if the bare, unadorned statement of our situation should be in danger of failing, we shall find able and zealous advocates in a British Senate, who will awaken and new point all the energies of beneficence by representing, in the resistless language of reason and truth, the national disgrace of leaving numbers of the most laborious, and, perhaps, not least deserving, of the Clergy to struggle through life on a provision scarcely adequate to the comfortable accommodation of an individual; much

* When, probably, forty pounds a year would purchase as many of the necessaries of life as eighty pounds will now.

leis to the numerous and pressing exigencies of a family, without any cheering reserve for the hours of languor and age, or the irresistible demands of sickness or accident; whilst, at the same time, they are condemned to see, almost daily, scenes of distress which they earnestly wish, but alas! can only wish to remove.

And that our application to the Legislature may more readily succeed, let us be particularly careful to second it by our lives; let us preserve in our hearts a strong, uniform, and lively sense of those duties which we would impress on our hearers, and conscientiously avoid in our own conduct what our office requires us to censure in others; let us not debase ourselves by indecent levities, or sordid company; be superior to filthy lucre, and scorn to court advancement by the degradation of our character; let us aspire only to the praise of exemplary life; the unfulfilled honour of active goodness; and be content to eat our bread in privacy and peace.

Conscious that "knowledge is pleasant to the soul," is equally ornamental and useful; let us diligently cultivate every kind of knowledge that tends to enlighten and purify the mind, but never forget that our principal attention must always be paid to the study of the Scriptures; here should we dwell with a cheerful application; and we must be void indeed of all taste, if, from their beautiful simplicity, and unequalled sublimity

mity and majesty, we do not find an exquisite delight therein.

Let us lay up for ourselves the unperishable treasures of wisdom, goodness, and religion ; the most substantial support, and the sweetest comfort of life ; let us invariably cultivate the self-rewarding virtues of peace and good-will with all, and be ever ready to exchange those offices of humanity without which society cannot be supported ; despising and detesting that narrow, illiberal, and unchristian spirit which would limit our own benevolence, or the favour of the equal Father of all beings, and of all worlds, to sects or parties, to climates or complexions ; never speaking unfavourably of liberty, civil or religious ; looking with a candid eye on the religious sentiments of all nations, from the conviction that, if they are productive of virtue, they are all acceptable to God, who is “ no respecter of persons ;” remembering that we are all travellers to the same heavenly country ; and that the period will soon arrive when the good, selected from all mankind, shall meet before that God who “ accepteth, in every nation, those that fear him, and work righteousness.”

F I N I S.

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